

**James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, May 20, 1798.  
With Notes. Transcription: The Writings of James  
Madison, ed. Gaillard Hunt. New York: G.P. Putnam's  
Sons, 1900-1910.**

**TO THOMAS JEFFERSON.<sup>1</sup> MAD. MSS.**

<sup>1</sup> The beginning of the letter relates entirely to building supplies which he wished Jefferson to procure for him.

May 20, 1798

The Alien bill<sup>2</sup> proposed in the Senate is a monster that must forever disgrace its parents. I should not have supposed it possible that such an one could have been engendered in either House, & still persuade myself, that it cannot possibly be fathered by both. It is truly to be deplored that a standing army should be let in upon us by the absence of a few sound votes. It may however all be for the best. These addresses to the feelings of the people from their enemies may have more effect in opening their eyes, than all the arguments addressed to their understandings by their friends. The President, also, seems to be co-operating for the same purpose.

<sup>2</sup> April 26th Jefferson wrote: "One of the war party, in a fit of unguarded passion, declared some time ago they would pass a citizen bill, an alien bill, and a sedition bill; accordingly, some days ago, Coit laid a motion on the table of the H of R for modifying the citizen law" *Writings* (Ford), vii., 244. May 3d he wrote: "The alien bill, proposed by the Senate, has not yet been brought in. That proposed by the H of R has been so moderated, that it will not answer the passionate purposes of the war gentlemen" ( *Id.*, 247). The Senate bill

## Library of Congress

reached Madison just before he wrote his letter of May 20th. This marks the beginning of his consideration of the subject.

Every answer he gives

to his addressers unmasks more and more his principles & views. His language to the young men at Pha. is the most abominable & degrading that could fall from the lips of the first magistrate of an independent people, & particularly from a Revolutionary patriot. It throws some light on his meaning when he remarked to me, "that there was not a single principle the same in the American & French Revolutions;" & on my alluding to the contrary sentiment of his predecessor expressed to Adêt on the presentment of the Colours, added, "that it was false let who would express it." The abolition of Royalty was it seems not one of his Revolutionary principles. Whether he always made this profession is best known to those, who knew him in the year 1776.—The turn of the elections in N. Y. is a proof that the late occurrences have increased the noise only & not the number of the Tory party. Besides the intrinsic value of the acquisition, it will encourage the hopes & exertions in other States. You will see by the Newspapers the turn which a Townmeeting took in Fredericksbg. I forgot to acknowledge the pamphlet containing the last Despatch from the Envoys recd with your letter of the 10th. It is evidently more in the forensic than Diplomatic stile, and more likely in some of its reasonings to satisfy an American Jury than the French Government. The defence of the provision article is the most shallow that has appeared on that subject. In some instances the reasoning is good, but so tedious and tautologous as to insult the understanding as well as patience of the Directory, if really intended for them, and not for the partial ear of the American public. The want of rain begins to be severely felt, and every appearance indicates a continuance of it. Since the 10th of April there has fallen but one inch of water, except a very partial shower of less than ½ an inch.

Adieu. Affecly.